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NINITI

Niniti: "Lady of Life" in Sumerian

Chairpersons:

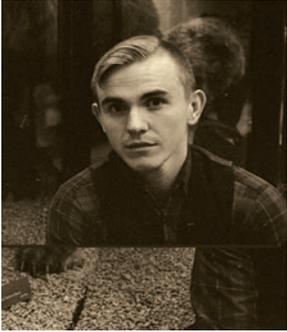


Dr Fadhil Thamir is President of The Union of Iraqi Writers. He is a well-known literary critic, editor and translator whose work has been widely published. His books include *Iraqi Contemporary Stories* (co-authored with critic Yasseen Al-Nasayer, 1971), *New Landmarks in Our Contemporary Literature* (1975), *The Repressed and the Unspoken in Arabic Narration* (2005) and *The Poetry of Modernism* (2012).



Born in 1972 in Erbil Kurdistan,

Dr Himdad Abdul-Qahhar is Dean at the College of Basic Education as well as Director of the English language centre and Director of Scholarships at University of Salahaddin. He has a PhD, M.A and B.A in English Language and Linguistics and since 1999 he has been a member of the teaching staff in the English Department, College of Education at the University of Salahaddin. Dr. Himdad is also an interpreter for the KRG government and clients including Sky News and the Los Angeles Times and a literary translator who has translated several books from English to Kurdish, including *The Masque of the Red Death* and several Sherlock Holmes novels. Dr Himdad worked as a panellist for the Fulbright Scholarship Programme and Humphrey Fellowship Programme. He participated in many writers courses, in training the trainer programmes.



SJ Fowler is a poet, artist, martial artist and vanguardist. He has published six collections of poetry, and been commissioned for original works of poetry, sonic art, visual art, installation and performance by the Tate, the London Sinfonietta, Electronic Voice Phenomena, Penned in the Margins, the Liverpool Biennale and Mercy. He has performed at venues across the globe and is translated into 13 languages. He is the poetry editor of 3am magazine, founder of the Maintenant series and curator the Enemies project.



Kei Miller was born in Jamaica in 1978. He has written novels, books of short stories, essays and four collections of poetry. He did his PhD at the University of Glasgow where he presently teaches Creative Writing and Caribbean Literature.



Nia Davies was born in Sheffield and studied English at the University of Sussex. 'Then Spree' – her first pamphlet of poems – came out from Salt in 2012. As well as her work with Literature Across Frontiers and Wales Literature Exchange, her current projects include collaborations with other poets and artists and co-editing the online journal Poems in Which. Her poems have been published internationally and translated into Turkish and Spanish. In spring 2014 she will edit the international quarterly Poetry Wales.



Vicki Feaver has published three collections of poetry: *Close Relatives* (1981), *The Handless Maiden* (1994) which won a Heinemann Award and was shortlisted for the Forward Prize, and *The Book of Blood* (2006), which was shortlisted for the Forward Prize and Costa Award. Her poem 'Judith', won a Forward Best Single Poem Prize. In 1993 she was awarded a Hawthornden Fellowship, in 1998 an Arts Council Writers Award and in 1999 a Cholmondeley Award. A new collection of poems, 'I Want! I Want!', is due out next year.



Ahmad Abdel Hussein is a poet living in Baghdad, Iraq. In 1990 he fled Iraq and lived in Canada until 2005 when he returned to Iraq. He runs the Iraqi magazine 'House of Poetry' and has numerous collections of poetry to his name including 'Painful Beliefs' (1999) and 'Paradise of Nothingness' (2008). In 2000, published jointly with Natiq Azeez 'Baptize Me with the Wine of Waves', a translation of the Iranian poetess Furog Farakh Zad poetry. He is the founder and president of the Poetry House in Iraq. Alongside his poetry works, he has worked as a cultural and political editor for many Iraqi newspapers including Nidaa' Ar-Rafidain, Al Sabah, Al Mada, among others.



Zhwen Shalai is a poet from Sulaimanyia, Iraqi Kurdistan with two poetry books along with numerous publications in national magazines and newspapers. She also works as a journalist and critic. Her first collection, 'The Autumn of my Life' was published in Sulaimania 2008. 'Neither you stayed, Nor the rain' was published by the Kurdish Writers Union in 2013.

Reel Iraq Writers



Mariem Maythem Qasem Al-Attar is a poet and fiction writer from Misan, Iraq. A women's rights advocate and established translator, her poems have been published internationally. Her first collection, 'WAAD' was published by Dar al-Arab Publishers.



Ali Wajeih is an Iraqi poet from Baghdad. His poems have been published in many Iraqi magazines and newspapers, and have been selected to be published in Iraqi and Arabic anthologies of poetry. Along with his poetry he has also worked as political and cultural editor for the Iraqi newspaper 'Al- Mada, Al- Alam, Tato' as well as others. He has received numerous awards for his poetry and has published three collections: 'Manfaeal'; 'My fingers speak, your body listens'; and 'Cancer; Black Prose'.

SULPHUR

(1)

it's raining sulphur...let me start my evening of questions
pardon me, I won't be saying good evening
my years have been judging me
asking if I was blessed
if I was fine when paying debts of the forest
ordainly, I evade
in the terrace of my soul, birds are not singing anymore
the bird was burnt by dawn...sacrificed for sulphur rains

(2)

as confidence grows, I pass a snare made for me
stepping on another genie and calling the mercy of god
breaking the arches that the past has shaded
the day before yesterday
unearthing my thoughts fifty times,
coming to a content
that was the replica of my mind
in spite of the wolf's insistence that I was the prey

(3)

if it was to be that she dies here anonymously
she won't be scared..
after witnessing here, the best of her days
after offering her radiance as a butterfly



Samarqand Al-Jabiry began writing short stories in 1998 whilst working as a teacher in kindergarten. Her poetry collections include *Twenty* (1997) and *Heart Fingerprints* (2007). She received Sharjah Prizes in 2007, including first place for a short story in the Arabic world and for her story collection *Two small bears*. She has also presented a television show for younger audiences and continues to work as a correspondent and photographer for several newspapers and websites.

I'm the Corpse

being the corpse, I did your shopping
 In the cold, I made bread alone
 and alone
 spent the dawn shivering in the kitchen
 neglected my life
 awaiting, your words of scorn
 what do you await
 I'm the corpse...
 I washed your dirty dishes and whispers
 and helped this youngster with his homework
 I taught that young lady some stitches
 and with all this...there are other things
 I can simply stretch out my hand under cold running water
 and dream of your warmth
 having infinite joys,
 growing around the washing basin
 I smile
 and as a corpse also...
 sadly stand to iron garments
 still...there is much to be
 I can wring myself along with clothing I'd spread
 imagining a fading age with no complement
 then I smile.



Nidal Alqadi was born in 1964 and is an Iraqi poet and novelist. She also trained and worked as an engineer. Her books include the poetry collection *Deposits for Relying Upon* (2001), two story collections *A familiar place for me* (1999, won third prize in the Sharjah competition) and *Sparrow of Edom* (2001) and a novel *Biography of a Shadow* (2009, The Arab Institution for Studies and Publication).

1-
You!
in a hat made of the sun
your feet belong to tattoos
and shoulder for a forest
I pick up your words from
the ground, I pick up the
ground
So it won't be buried in the
forest;
In the forest, warning the
birds... your kiss is pierced
in my shoulder.

You!
rub remnant by remnant
treading me,
Erase me.. erase me.. erase
me, the birds have been
eaten my shoulder.

2-
Im who poured out her
hand, in my hands ..
o gloom I know you are
green
I know that the river is still
in your hut
do not tell him that I am on
the door
And years are passing on
the door
So, if you implant your black
pin in my shine!
implant it deeply Once .. so ..
yeah .. so ..
and do not awaken me.
untill dissipate
while I m water and dissi-
pated
so take my hand
Take it.. your hand
and let us swing, if you want,
as two glooms
and a door laughed, lost its
sill, when I confused and lost
sill, lost foot
so do not tell him ..
do not awaken me

DAY COIFFURE, NIGHT SALON

Life goes on with its baldness,
 through a coiffure,
 and does not heed hairdo,
 while scissor sends out its tongue,
 and laughs!...

*

The earth with all its creatures,
 ascend to the sky,
 there, they deliver their newborns....

*

In every moment,
 a moment exhales,
 to meet a time of iron....

*

Those who have reached the moon now,
 are my grandsons whom I forgot,
 when my hair whitened....

*

The night asks about its salon customers,
 and the day lies to them and falsifies their haircuts.

*

Why, when they ask me every time about ax's wisdom,
 trees became depressed,
 this was on the road from Melbourne to Sydney.

*

Gold feels pity for their brownness,
 and silver embraces their silver of braids,
 They with gold and in it,
 mourn for their fates,
 and praise goldsmiths' fingers.

*

I am walking to a rose,
 that walks to its glory,
 on a nearby grave.

*

I should go in,
 it is the wedding party of Mercury!

*

All these,
 and you say we don't have lilies,
 and I don't have any lover.

*

From ziggurats' pain,
 he weaves his wisdom and calms not.

*

The sun always asks about noon's pain,
 her love, the day....

night-spotted shirt,
and gardens' flowers.

*

I was having a game in her
body's thresh floor,
so, I chronicled wheat's
trinity.

*

Gardens blabber,
the happiness of perfume all
the time.

*

I am the one, who heard
about ruby's mother,
in the paper of commenda-
tion,
hence, blame was bothered
of musk,
and the wind chased it.

*

When the daytime married
his hours' bee,
the nighttime drowned in
era's honey.

*

Every morning,
I bathe with the water of
butter's women,
sometimes, I sip their white-

ness' butter,
and seek refuge with cocks'
crow.

*

..... and when Mariana, the
Brazilian hugged me,
in Melbourne disco,
the aroma of coffee beamed
in my mouth,
we both got drunk without
wine.

*

Oh,
I have forgotten my date-
palm in its shade in Sydney,
I was dreaming I was in
Battween,
I woke up with murmur of
water's body.....

*

Woe unto me,
How many holes are there in
the jubbah?
whenever I stared at it,
I became blind.

*

..... I thought myself a flower,
when I walk,
moths fall down from me.

*

Oh my God,
Do wounds have names?
My first wound's name is
Adam.

*

The dove that scrubs its
beak to my pupil,
was trying to steal the tears,
so, its beak broke.

*

If you give me back a span of
the sky,
I will give you the whole
earth,
but, I will miss it,
because my name writes
down,
its entire letters,
in every point of the earth's
spherical surface.

*

When my mother sent her
handkerchief with tears post,
I heard commotion at the
door of doomsday,
and when I ran to it,
I saw crowds of martyrs,
wrangle on the inscriptions

of the handkerchief.

*

East is the graveyard of the
world,
and west is its galley of
cabarets.

*

I thought wheat ears as
being crests of ziggurats,
thus, birds and mothers
reside in my head.

*

When air passes with its tall
stature,
tree heads bow,
when we depart our divine
gardens,
our sweethearts' scents
leave.

*

When deceased ones lost
their graves,
they came back to their
prisons,
and the prison narrowed,
they hold their coffins,
back to the sky.

on like you.....

I want a soul for a rhyme,
to plant its R in my blood,
and build from R and S a
stature.....

*

I did not set apart life's L and
love's L,
due to my lack of fairness
and lament,
on her henna.....

*

Moon's friend always asks
me,
Who is sun's father,
and who is sun's mother?
I go on spin and become
giddy,
as he used to spin and fade
away.....

*

If the sky spilt once,
from god's neck,
we would run nakedly and
giddy from nakedness,
and book our seats in
paradise.....

*

Now, I am going to take the
life to,
Michel Foucault's museum of
madness,
to cut her white braids,
or, to dye them with henna,
for me to marry her.....

*

I open the box of grand-
mother Shammuramat,
and see it flushing with
fairies.....

*

I am infested with demon,
fiend and insanity,
and afternoon's demon,
steals my creatures.....

*

I should have plucked all
those far stars,
to walk in my funeral.....

*

My language is time,
my tongue is the plummet
of place,
but, when grief suddenly
descends over me,
my words trip over it,

and stick to my roof of
mouth....

Since your eyes are my sky,
whenever, martyrs convoys
go by,
your eyes shed tears,
and rain descendants,
who grow date-palms and
countries,
even in the wasteland.....

A SKY OF SPARROWS

A sky of sparrows,
a sky of sparrows that clam-
ored with its blueness,
whenever they were chirp-
ing,
blueness was rallying in their
beaks,
where rain was flowing out
there.

*

In the birthday party of my
grandson, Naramsin,
sparrows were sending their
chirps away,
the heavenly canto was sum-
ming up in the sura of Sin,
and the rain was flowing out
of sky's mouth.

*

The wind,
constantly, Sweeps packages'
drowsiness.

*

The sun that ran away from
snakes,
came back to try my



Shakir Majeed Sivo was born in Bakhdida in 1954. He is active in Kurdish and Iraqi writers' unions and has edited the Al-A'ila magazine and the Najm Bethnahren magazine. His collections of poetry include I'll Stand in his Fresh Air and Aphrodite's Necklace, and numerous academic works on literature. He has also written plays, for both adults and young people. He was honored with the Syric Innovation Shield for poetry in Sydney during his visit to Australia in 2008 by the Assyrian-Chaldean-Syric council.

FOR FEAR OF TIGRIS'S ENVY AND INSANITY

In Halabja,
his mother birthed him with-
out two eyes,
when he grew up,
used to stare at her mirror,
He carried on staring,
and praying,
then, a scrap of light touched
him,
two eyes sprouted seeing
whole the world,
he began to goad mankind...
*

Life is worthy of its ambi-
guity
..... and, then brought
life to Mahmod Darwish.
He said: This is my wife,
I was feeding her green but-
terflies every day,

death is her servant,
but, whenever I saw him
trying to scheme,
I was surprising and ago-
nizing him with my strange
creatures,
less flowers, beyond almond
blossom,
praise of the high shadow
behind the butterfly.....
*

Death is peeping over Bio
always,
and, when he hungers,
swallows bio's circled O,
and, its open O on mankind,
and does not commit sui-
cide.....

.....
And when he was staring
into my mirror,
sees my wrinkles in their
luster,
its sand rotted and afflicted
with strabismus.....
*

I envy you, oh martyrs,
for I cannot keep my blood

Carve me on severance's columns as a candle,
 That its forelock flames whenever,
 lips of your apparition touched my song...
 baptize confessions' chanting with tears,
 take ablution glowingly in the aorta of soul's shirt,
 and bury the cross of time in a topographic deviation,
 to let me travel in your darkness as eagerness in its shine,
 that splits dream's spaces... and the songs of my language,
 since our love's cloud has drawn the chapter of grief,
 in the fogs of the wound.

....

I inhale you in a rainy flavor until the last spark of life,
 with a long blame and deep gladness,
 away....
 from all worlds,
 unconsciousness of the age travels in us,
 and on the moon's shores throws us,
 so as to....
 repair lunacy's brightness there.

BLEEDING FROM OBLIVION'S TWILIGHT

On the surface of night's pain,
 the cloud of memory,
 rains me with its grieved nostalgia,
 and sates my deserts' pillow,
 on the sky's rocks,
 in order to comb the roadsides of the wakefulness.

I will draw footsteps of the soul with tear's blood.
 Your apparitions shackle my wrist,
 Bleeds my dreams' eyelids.
 Your betrayal's daggers, Sir,
 that are planted in my letter's neck,
 enjoy my pain's color,
 and,
 absence draws me a tear,
 for heart's candle,
 to illuminate with eyeholes' moaning,
 paths of our long night,
 in the cave impossible wishes.
 I recited you a pain pierces veins' windows...
 breaks arteries' windows.
 I took you off myself the attires of repenting,
 to purge myself from melting in you in dawn's rivers,
 to tear myself up and your lunacy at the verges of horizon.
 I will crown you on the throne of my wound as a king,
 who practices the rites of his dictatorship,
 in a child's innocence,
 and spread fragments of lunacy over the mirrors,
 of the last twilight,
 as tunes of sorrow's rhyme,
 that rebels against oblivion's skyline,
 then, I will have you,
 in defeating and failures.

and one of the stars whispers you...

- You are the Eid of every wound,
and every deception, you are its master's grace-
and with the nectar from my grand wound,
it leaves a signature on your pillow...
I will stay loving you until my breaths kill me...

THE SUN IN HER LAST FLEE

Your conspiring pulse with the twilight tattooed by my blood

That dawn is tearful,
for a prayer that memory couldn't keep what was recited of
its verse of loyalty,
We were the sun and the moon and what was between
them.....
suspicious that night's tear makes love with daylight's smile,
and assured that no suspicion can pollute it,
that that false prayer will not be completed in one day,
hence,
the tree leaves aborted their dreams,
languages extruded their words in seas their paining waves,
and the nights have tales on you from fancy's volcanoes,
declare every now and then lying exhales we believe in agony,
so as to bloodletting the sky's forehead with words' rains,
those passing....
on earth's surface,
coquet my bleeding's gate,

they strand tales for my distress,
and dress all my lines from their pitch-dark interpretations,
so, the gap will be widened between horizon and A,
that thrown on pain's domains,
to...

let the sun fall down into deception's gloominess,
their tales dances with a day's blackness,
and will be addicted to a white dawn,
and the echo's whining will rise repeating:
Peace be upon the sun of our Baghdad,
and its Tigris, Al-Rasheed and Hasan A'jmi,
and Liberation Square, Labors Muster.
Peace be upon the kneeling down ones at Faiq hasan's
pigeons.
Peace be upon Siba' square and the Za'eem's statue.
Peace be upon Andakus Square.
Peace and peace and peace.
Be upon our Baghdad.

ON THE SHORES OF THE MOON... WE MEND THE LIGHT OF MADNESS

Oh, the traveler in my blood's whiteness,
thousands of cries exploded with passion's lava,
and cracked for their whining my wound's sky,
dream's volcanoes blazed dream's pupil,
confession.



Ruaa Zuhair Shukr was born in 1987 and holds a BA in English Literature from Kufa University. She is a writer and translator. She is a member of the General Union of Writers and a founder member of Arabic Sard House. Her works include *Lines With the Ink of the Soul* and *The Sun in her Last Escape*. She has won numerous awards for her journalistic writing.

EID OF (YOUR WOUND) IS LOVE

(To you, oh the eastern man passing my veins... I don't expect a love ticket from you)

The yore knew me a wound scented with worry, colored with wail's perfume,
 in my bleeding's color; lovers celebrate their Eid,
 they color hearts' skies with yearning's fire,
 and you color my spaces with fancy's passing clouds...
 to rain me and my waiting's undulations are deception,
 and to wet my moons' thirst with your love's drinking glass,
 petals of passion and madness burn their fingertips they mix
 their breaths with rose's scent,
 and you plant my yearning as thorns to bleed heart's fingertips,
 with your tribal dictatorship.
 You sip me as wine... and become drunk,
 so, I perform ritual ablution with your wounds as hopes...
 to pray dreams crucify me on the pain's board,
 and recite your awaiting as a knife that slays my twilight,
 in my past night of love...
 I made love with tears there in the waiting shirt and its fancy,
 and you in Lebanese tunes danced with the naked,
 and in this love night of mine,
 you made love with the dawn of a new wound,
 and stars' repent dance with me for a wound they dyed a
 dream for me,

POETIC IMAGES

Bosom

I was in a woman's bosom,
I was shocked,
I was frightened that she would hit me easily.

Corruption

A fort of corruption was opened in my country,
there was no space for humans,
humans were at the door with bashful eyes!

Struggle

Stars hid themselves,
of the sun's scorch,
the moon became a nightmare,
and, announced alienation.

Atheist

The atheist is not the one who does not perform prayers.

A door

I wish I knew,
How many doors are knocked every day,
and will not open!

Sunset

Don't overwork yourself,
tomorrow will certainly come.

Departure

When did you decide to leave,
so as to pray!

Voice

Ears cannot be
familiar with all voices.

Hill

Flood and rain,
altered our earth's hill,
to a desert.

Tomato

I threw a single tomato into the air,
the ground became stained with blood.

Smoking Pipe

the smoke of uncle Othman's pipe,
made un-raining clouds feel ashamed.

NIGHT ALSO BECAME TRANSLUCENT

I knew the night with darkness,
I didn't see it translucent,
but, in that translucent night
with its translucence,
I made the night translucent
I washed its blackness with my
tears,
and with its voices and tunes,
by its glory and ahs filled with
sorrow,
stars twinkled,
enraged the moon in the sky,
because the moon was unable
to be equal to your beauty.
Your first tear:
Gave a definition to the mountains,
made murky water in rivers
and streams pure,
added to the spring other
features and glamour,
autumn delayed its leaves

falling down,
summer became no more
kindhearted,
it has increased its scorching
heat,
winter has decreased its
coldness,
due to asylum...
The second tear:
With its second tears,
drowned us in sadness,
with bundles of roses and
daffodils,
it took us to graveyards,
and we thought of depressed
opposition,
and, we bowed our statures.
With the third tears:
Angels became messengers of
an unknown homeland,
and with tipping the liquor of
truth,
it made us forget ourselves,
and made us dance drunkenly,
time remained unknown,
and with light,
it made us forget the dark
nights.

THE NIGHT BLAZED ALSO

A comet fell and burned one side of my town,
the other burned also,
they talked about an electric contact,
and I am the sun of fire,
show me a place to burn,
the sea is full of water,
you suckled snow,
I will never be full with coldness,
and you with warmth,
come and go down to this town,
so that the fire of contact would die,
and no more markets and halls would burn,
betide the contact,
and long live Addison.



Abdulsalam Salih Mohammed Balayi was born in 1965 in Duhok. He is a member of the Director's Board of the Kurdish Writers' Union and Editor-in-Chief of *Svoors*, the magazine for children. He has been active in international literature festivals and is interested in children's human rights. His published works include *Night's Body* and *Night and Liquor*.

THERE WAS NO UMBRELLA IN ORDER NOT TO GET WET

I am unable to collect the
beads of your necklace,
I am unable to count your
eyelashes,
I am unable to stop travels
to your body,
all traits of beauty has gone
to dissipate from me,
I have a suspicion,
moles of your body will
become my address,
so, I beg your pardon,
I will go and quest after
myself,
as your repulse did not give
time to find myself!
night weeping,
stopped me...
Night's stars turned into
tears,
lulled to me,
the moon caressed my head

with hands,
and put me to bed,
so as to introduce me to a
dream.
The cloud became an in-
former,
enraged rain against me,
and there was no umbrella in
order not to get wet!
You were not that kiblah,
which I resorted to...
My want was,
a tableau from nature,
a picture,
of nudity,
an apple,
from the desert,
a pure snow,
from the high mountains,
so you would come,
to be my nymph,
once again..

Oh, you the most lethal
 since all Cain-likes,
 I told you:
 Do not put me out,
 it is not time,
 cannot bear all of this
 separation,
 and drink me sip after sip,
 Did you forget?
 I loved you as ascetics' per-
 sistence,
 and you, in inventiveness,
 I shut the door,
 you are the lanes of all the
 doors,
 patience of Job fell from me,
 without long-suffering,
 I ignited a fire in the anniver-
 sary's wick,
 and you,
 What a torturer you were
 you
 fractured my depths,
 and planted the darkness...
 I presented my soul,
 in the hands of tenants of
 sacrificial,
 I wanted to live more,

but you exuded me from life,
 you broke a couple of things
 in me:
 A slight shadow,
 of tree leaves controversy,
 the weaved hiding place,
 out of birds' melody,
 a necklace of advice,
 from the silent words of
 Socrates...

I wanted to live more,
 and reconcile with childhood
 with you,
 I told you:
 A crazy wind has hit you,
 Why did you turn out to be
 the remnants of Cain-likes,
 grab the hands of this girl,
 lest we should not forget
 our humpbacked alleys,
 as our shoes became filled
 with wounds,
 let's not forget the blurry
 supplications of our mothers,
 while they were rubbing
 their the heads to the pray-
 ing carpet ,

let's not forget the falling
 apples of Newton,
 they silenced our minds,
 What a crazy wind hit you?
 I wove loneliness from you
 drop by drop,
 and you turned out to be
 the remnants of Cain likes,
 Why?
 You put me out point after
 point,
 and I smashed the heads of
 all my life's ways,
 I shook the cruise through
 the sky,
 with my kite,
 and, with a slingshot,
 I decayed the teeth all the
 trees,
 and with a rubber balloon,
 I ignited commotion,
 with a bag of melodies,
 I dropped the weariness,
 which clamor has erupted in
 the doomsday?
 and you,
 On what doctrine were you?
 What death wind has hit

you?
 I wanted to live longer,
 I did not know you were
 free from waiting,
 and I'm filled with waiting
 fire.
 And you,
 Oh, the most lethal since
 Cain,
 and the remnants of Cain-
 likes...

you became a foe,
and, I come and go inside
falling leaves...

What do you say?
Grief is screaming in my
imagination,
What did I do?
I have not stabbed the heart
of beautiful grief with knife's
words,
What do you say?
Do not teach me separation
in crying colors,
while I am a coming-late
poem,
I climb death and do not die.
Oh, separation,
do not make my fantasy
bluish,
there is still a telling breeze
which persists,
in order to fill your soul
with breeze,
there is a bit of a waiting,
I plant in your heart,
I would like to erase the
chitchat with that window,

from you,
a chitchat that worried your
heart,
I'm more than a wound that
you can wound me,
let everything go quietly.
Oh, my heart's beloved,
calmness has fallen down,
it is the fracture of the truth
in one crack,
on the wall of your voice,
my loneliness glasses have
been shattered,
do not teach me separation,
I'm not myself and will not
be back to it,
as all my roads are closed in
your imagination.
Believe me,
I am wilted and sad with
crystals of your name,
you the most lethal since
Cain,
stop killing...

Time was the date of my
waiting season,
my seconds were in need of

a breath of hope,
my waiting has been
scratched.
Oh, the extra entity of Cain,
in the severe time of your
alteration into Cain.
What do you say?
Since I am that autumnal girl,
I'm not like other autumn
seasons,
What are all of these separa-
tions?
Which come out of the cage
of your soul?
did not kill all this fantasy,
Why kill all these imagina-
tions?
Is it the fall of disbelief?
You drop them at the top of
the absolute?
I wanted to be made availa-
ble to your autumns,
where, the wind would not
scream,
tree leaves would not put off,
water would not drown
from the gray hair,
trees handles would not be

handcuffed,
tiredness would not grow in
swallows,
in their travelling habit.
Oh, the extra entity of Cain,
In the severe time of your
alteration into Cain,
What do you say?
When my prayers reach to
the heart of the water,
since I am that autumnal girl,
I'm not like other autumn
seasons,
you quit the remains of
Cain-likes,
Oh, you the man of blasphe-
my,
stop killing...

I wanted to live longer,
but you were reluctant,
I wanted to change my life,
but you were reluctant,
What a hell of my happiness
you were
You, the most lethal since
Cain,
Your love was my cell's lock.



Roj Mohammed Laiq (known as Roj Helebjeji) was born in Halabja in the late 1960s. She trained as a teacher in Sulaiymania. She published her first poem under a pseudonym in 1986 in the Hawkary newspaper. Her literary career came to an abrupt end due to the Halabja chemical attack. She returned to writing after the Kurdish Uprising, publishing five poetry collections (including *The Shadow of a Passion's Foot* and *An Autumn of January's Coat*), for which she has garnered numerous prizes and participated in many literary festivals.

REMNANTS OF CAIN-LIKES

You were more lethal than
Cain,
I learned features of deser-
tion from you,
you filled me up with aban-
donment.
Oh, don't say anything,
anything...

From a lover, you became a
foe,
for my heart's smiles,
from a lover, you turned into,
annihilation,
of my flying youth's gardens,
you have been through the
dominance of my words.
Do not talk about anything,
do not talk about the pas-
sion of love,
you have slaughtered...

You are more lethal than
Cain.
What did you excel in love?

When you threw forgiveness
letters,
you never can reconcile
passion,
your head is free of flower
prayers in vases,
and, of salutation of sun-
flower and pomegranate
blossoms,
surrounding the gardens,
as your prayer is free of
rains' pains,
in the homeland of the
divinity...

You the most lethal since
Cain,
creativity in adoration is:
Maturation of fruits on the
handles of trees,
bud roses sprouting on the
petiole,
water brooks nearby facts,
planting birds in the plains of
heavens...
and you,
What remnants of Cain are
you?

18
Our daily dreams,
look like the clumsiness of
the wind.
Don't be confused of your-
selves,
as what Nietzsche says:
You should recognize me.

19
The wind comes from every-
where,
the sky is the house of flying,
I walk through the imagina-
tion,
I don't have a place.

20
I write the age with the
water,
a drop after a drop,
and give it to the wind,
it will waste it.

21
Until the wind comes,
in the streets of nothing,
I will run way from the
homeland.

22
Human and the wind,
erupt,
from their unseen shapes.

23
All my age,
is hit by the wind,
under the rain.

24
I will picnic all over the
world,
imagining that the wind will
take it,
I close my eyes,
something slumps,
I stand up.

25
I undressed my life from the
door,
there was nothing in it,
except the wind.

26
The wind stumbles on his
back,
facing life.

27
He says,
my son,
like the wind,
has memorized the world,
I say,
my daughter,
takes the water to the pigeons.

28
A human being is a vacuum in the darkness,
he uses the wind's heart,
to come across himself.

29
The street is not aware of the wind,
because of human beings and vehicles,
he drives alone,
without license.

30
The anguish of the sudden stop,
is not from the wind,
not from the rain,
but from the heart.

THE WIND RAINS

1

I put my head on the wind,
as I have lost my pillow,
I fell into water.

2

My mother is aged,
her hair goes like the wind
to all directions,
her most sacred number is
eighty eight.

3

In my dream,
I fell from the crest of the
wind,
into a hole,
with the rain.

4

Though the wind,
is blind,
it rocks the hot heart of the
sunlight,.

5

I put my heart under the
rain,
I go with the wind,
and burn the homeland.

6

A good morning,
does not stay well in the
afternoon,
it is drunk in the evenings,
sways to every direction.

7

Once a week,
I water wind's gardens,
So, my loneliness would not
dry out.

8

Like a cat,
I spray some water on my
face,
and begin my meal fearfully,
whom I will not open the
door for is the wind,
whom I will open the door
for is the wind.

9

Let him not turn around,
I will take a photo with the
rain,
blue like the earth.
This is my feelings to life.

10

Fifth of sixth month,
I will push the hot to fight
the wind,
I will go back to the water.

11

In the house of the confused
wind,
I would like to leave,
I will forget my shoes,
I will raise an umbrella under
the rain.

12

When the rain sees human,
the sky will be spilled in his
hands,
I will go back to the dark-
ness,
with the eyes of the wind.

13

The wind's bazaar,
dose not know,
the rich or the poor.

14

I will puff a cigarette,
to make smoke,
like the loving of the home-
land.

15

During observing the past,
I plunged into the sea,
I am waiting for the wind.

16

In the fight of my dreams,
he does not hold my hand
well,
I will wake up.

17

Like the time,
I will incise wind's heart,
the rain will medicate him.

17
Don't hurry,
what wind has taken,
would go back to the sea,
with the rain.

18
Each of my children says
something:
Life is hung to a tree.
Who weaves it.

19
No piece of advice is useful,
put those pretty talks into
the garbage,
everyone lives for himself.

20
I don't want life to be only
numbers,
I perform physical exercises,
in the garden of loneliness.

21
What grieves me,
is not the sky,
is not the earth,
it is the lost time.

22
Like the rain,
my mother is linked to
nature,
I am to the curse.

23
Life is like a wind-taken
traveler,
it fills all its emptiness,
with chaos,
I, with headache pills.

24
I am coming from far,
to be exposed to the rain,
it waves from faraway.

25
For a long time,
I followed the homeland,
I forgot,
to be back to life.

26
In the mornings,
how often they tell me wake
up.
My dreams turned into
vapor.

27
The wind makes fun of
human,
humans make fun of the rain,
there is no danger in this,
because we are free.

28
If there wasn't today,
yesterday wouldn't come
back from the cemetery.
If we don't say good morning

to each other,
Tomorrow will not come.
29
Today I will go to the water's
grave,
instead of the sunlight,
I will fix a rose on wind's
collar.

30
My heart is grieved,
doctors narrate it,
as a story.

31
Until now,
sparrows are warbling,
in the shade of the gallows.

THE PICTURE OF THE WAVE IN THE WIND'S EYE

1
My heart is far too confused,
I don't know what to do,
I will expose few words to
the wind.

2
The wind harasses the
world,
I have hung my eyes to the
rain,
I did not like the fall down of
that glint into the sea,
for finding the life.

3
What falls,
is not the wind,
but, human.

4
I would like to be the water,
behind the sketches of Qara-

ni Jameel,
to caress starlings' shadow,
I would like to be the wind,
not to collect the lines of
collapses,
but, for the echo of freedom.

5
As to cat's speech,
rain doesn't fall.

6
You cannot cross the street,
due to rain's bazaar.

7
In my childhood,
when the sky was cloudy,
my heart was severely,
seeing me off,
through the window of
loneliness.

8
The open eyes of the sea,
do not share the grief,
in my eyes understanding,
after adaptation,

human goes back to nature,
as if you are not aware,
I am about to become old.

9
No one is aware of the wind,
it behaves wantonly with the
world.

10
My friends go for a picnic,
I ponder in loneliness.

11
The wind comes and goes,
to memorize,
the water waves.

12
How high would the moun-
tain,
be the rain wets it.
How man would be great,
he is alone.

13
In the crowd of this and that,
I will be lost,
like a rain drop in the sea,
but, a sea will take it,
it is called the death.

14
Today,
the countryside is shiny,
I hope,
I would have left the dark-
ness,
in the hospital.

15
Nowadays,
lots of rain is falling.
A day comes,
rain strokes,
will peck my body.

16
When my child babbles,
sleep takes away.
Look at this picture,
water has hung himself,
at the house ledges.



Abdulmattalib Abdullah was born in 1962 and studied at the Technical Institute in the Health Department. During his studies, he spent most of his time on literature and has been an active member in literary forums in Erbil since then. He refused to join the military during the war with Iran and was considered a defaulter; at the time this carried an execution sentence. During this time he read continuously. An execution pardon for all defaulters was issued by the Baath government, and he surrendered and served in the military for four months. After the invasion by Kuwait, he fled the army and settled in Kurdistan. His published works include *Water's Shadow*, a collection of poetry, as well as many essays on literary theory and translations of poetry. He has won awards for his poetry from the Galaweze Festival for Literature and Enlightenment, and for his literary criticism from the Kurdish Writers' Union, as well as many others.

Note:

This collection of poems was written in 2010. They are the product of my dreams, imagination, and visions as a global citizen. These poems are the coming together of mouth and words. This collection is the negligence of sins, oppression and disgrace of human beings. I want to say that my work does not serve naturalism, but builds a house for dreams and imaginations. It is an attempt to get out of ourselves and to release what occupies us inside.

DAYS ON GRASSES' MEMORY

I leave the alertness away,
and spread the sails of
memory,
I mumble in our prayers
plunged in storm's tears.
Oh sun...
Oh wind...
Oh paths...
Let the stature of the sacred
grass burn,
and gardens' boundaries
vanish,
with our amazement's space,
to let tree branches lean
over kisses gleams.
.....

So, here I am,
I dress my heart with its
childhood,
and cry dusting off charm's
nostalgia:
Oh dreams' clusters,
Oh gardens of the kind-

hearted sun,
Oh ecstasy's angles framed
with smuggled kisses,
wake up.
.....
A god smashes another age,
at your feet,
smiles to me as awareness
portrays your eyelashes,
I seek refuge with morning
and love,
I draw my halo's wish round
your day,
hence, go to the doomsday's
bosom,
I will meet you in some
other nectar,
to hug your lineaments,
in an everlasting desire.
.....

Where were we?
Paths were not carrying the
endurance of our gatherings,
Oh, partner of loneliness,
and the immortal question's
language,
and the concealed silence,
and the postponed dreams.

Where were we?
Who leaked out your whis-
per to the broken soul on
the roads?
Who planted you as a riddle
in the hope's memory?
Who tattooed your name
on the palm's lines?
Who closed heart's doors
on you?
Who extended your per-
fume to the filled chest with
dimness?
Who poured the pulses of
your existence in forlorn-
ness?
Who instated you as the
lonesome individual,
on the throne of poem?
You, only you... only you...
.....

Today, I apologize for your
recklessness...
for my love's storms,
for my emotions' wrinkles,
for my ribs' smash,
in the seasons of your wind,

I apologize today.
The harp of my bored heart,
bleeds on the towns' paths,
doesn't know a concert save
you.
My town is a temple light-
ened by Pleiades of your
white ashes.
Forgive my dimness,
I raise my hand with veran-
da's oath,
wherever I depart,
it is towards you... towards
you.

as you have carved your face,
in the middle of the instant
like an ogre,
like a blood storm.
Your face still looks like her
jogging hand palm,
as an arrow,
in the footers' eyes.
You don't know,
she had smothered the night
with an exiled laugh,
and promised the shores,
with fingers sew the runaway
waves,
You don't know,
the small Yousif,
is her friend,
and the well's gift,
is a pomegranate,
and the apparel's wolf,
is the end of fears.
You don't know,
you split the whang of a
noisy gift,
and declare your birth,
God's birth,
there.

**TO THE FIRST
LADY OF WAITING
MY MOTHER AS SHE WAITS
IN FRONT OF MY FATHER'S
FRAMED - WITH - WAR
PHOTO**

THE LAST PHOTO OF THE HOMELAND

You were upright,
where buses were seaports,
swallowing the roar of
pigeons.
The morning behind you is
filled with cold,
as a sinful farewell without
kisses,
the bus brandishes its mouth
to the wind,
and waits for gulping you.
You were captured behind a
handful of the lead,
you mummify it as a laby-
rinth,
you were a soldier,
your photo wears the coun-
tenance of a gun,

your helmet drinks age's
pulses,

your chest is enchased with
mothers' scare.
You are a soldier!!
and I am waiting for the war,
to die on your hand palms.

.....

I missed you,
that's your photo in my palm,
stole my evening's serenity,
I don't avow the dying age
from my memoirs,
dimness steps blooms round
my eyelids,
and also,
I miss you..

.....

Come out to me from arter-
ies of silence,
tear the coffins of the mum-
mies,
scribble the memory of the
last bullet you shot,
unstitch yesterday's stop.

At a photo of the battle,
I am waiting for you here,
at the light,
depict me another day,
I depict you a homeland's
age,
that photo's eyes never
mummify.



Azhar Ali Hussein, Diploma in Arabic Language 2001. Azhar is currently studying at the Faculty of Fine Arts, University of Baghdad and a member of the Union of Writers and writers in Iraq. She is a storywriter and poet and has had collections of poems and short stories published in many newspapers and magazines. Azhar wrote the screenplay for a collection of short films and documentary shown at film festivals and has written numerous award-winning literary articles. Azhar is an activist in the field of women's rights and civil society.

**TO THOSE CHILDREN
WHOM FEAR DWELLED,
THEN THEY DWELLED
STREETS**

GOD'S BIRTH

I am afraid; I don't possess a language,
in front of your small secret,
and, you farewell your innocence,
and sell chewing gums,
in the middle of the mud.
You break in the chaos of the world,
with the mornings of the ash,
and a pulse never childhood dwelled.
In you, there is a fumed color from flowers,
and a face holds up distraction.
In you,
from the earth,
perfume of the calamity,
and the lost reed pipe.
In you, and what is all in you,
is a frank confession,

of a homeland,
that avows its frustration,
and wears the taste of blackness.
.....
And you,
you the little like a cocoon,
discover the light with dried seedlings,
and sing with your green,
the pigmy,
gentle,
for a bed,
for colors never be overcrowded,
a day, with flowers.
.....
The milk has been dried,
as a stiff crystal,
in your busts, oh City.
Sir, oh death,
don't dance like a desperate frog,

and runs aimlessly,
it might have the oneiromancy
of shells' dreams,
and take them back to the
sea,
it might have borrowed the
moonlight's robe,
and take them back to the
moon,
it might get the map of a
country,
and give it back to the
homeland,
it might have understood the
wisdom of leaves falling,
and write it down in autumn's
daily notebook,
it might seek for eternity, but
cannot find,
eternity was that mirage,
disappeared in a wink,
it was that sandals,
that turned into clogs,
it was that decision,
that was not fulfilled,

it was that poem,
that was not completed,
it was that Caesar's war,
that defeated him very soon.
Who searches for eternity,
should visit death's house,
there, he is laid on death's
wall,
in an oblong frame on the
wall,
with a nail,
as the nail Jesus was crucified
with,
no one should search for
eternity,
eternity has been killed like
this poem.
Here, who understand the
dialect of this poem,
as it says:
Here is the kingdom of
death,
there is no life to dream
with,
no poet to write me down

as I am,
no garden for me to grow in,
no street for me to walk
there daringly,
no Solomon to pacify between
wolf and seep,
no god to worship,
it is very strange,
I do not understand in writing
this poem,
there is no day,
the verse of death is not
read on life,
there is no night,
wolf's ululation cross my
ears,
there no year,
we do not say:
Alas for the past year,
here is the kingdom of the
hangman,
the hangman has killed this
poem,
a poem whose head was a
painter's head,

his hand was a pianist's hand,
his heart was of a poet,
his voice was of a singer,
his back was of a historian,
and his legs were of a traveler.
What a brutality killing this
poem,
as its soul had crouched
under the veil of an evening,
just like an autumn leaves of
a pencil,
shook off and died.

and prayers next to a sufi.
 My hands are filled with
 supplications,
 send them to the heaven,
 possibly, my voice will echo
 in your ears,
 and you forgive me in a reply,
 an answer in only one line,
 I comprehended the silence
 of the stone,
 taught me, I am esteemed in
 my place,
 I comprehended the silence
 of the wall,
 taught me obedience,
 I comprehended the silent
 withering of a flower,
 taught me not to flirt,
 for my beauty,
 but, I will never comprehend
 your silence,
 my dear, why are your silent?
 your silence kills me,
 your farness crazes me.

This autumn,
 it was decided to dance with
 you,
 to walk out with you in
 evenings,
 I didn't know,
 this autumn,
 instead of you,
 my dance will be with tree
 leaves,
 and my evening walking outs
 will be with loneliness.

A MURDERED POEM

Oh time,
 this is my last breath,
 and the last-wasted seconds
 of repentance,
 that will become spilled
 letters,
 a drunkard paper sips us.
 These are my last hallucina-
 tions,
 the last silences of you,
 that a pencil would read.
 These are my last lying
 laughs in your mouth,
 and the last tears of your
 crocodiles,
 you pour for me.
 These are my last tours,
 and the last hide-and-seeks
 of you,
 that a ruin would confine.
 This is my last age's thread,
 and your last hangings,
 over the wall of fading.
 This is the last me,

and the last you,

as the last world's pome-
 granate,
 that Saryas and his friends
 could not reach,
 along with my father's last
 wills,
 which they could not depart
 his mouth,
 as the last battles,
 that would not be ended,
 still in their starts,
 like the start of the last ends,
 that I will end,
 with the correction fluid.
 I will wipe out all my signa-
 tures,
 on the bill of life,
 otherwise,
 when is the birth of such
 lines,
 I do not understand the
 dalliance of this poem,
 except what I see,
 it has shouldered the journey,

and I am from the heaven,
till when you destroy the
wall of my beauty,
I want to make the sun my
robe and wear it,
I put the moon as a rose in
my hair,
cord the stars as beads for
my neck.
What a despotism, my friend,
what a despotism,
passing by heedlessly,
observing love,
mirage's love,
observing death,
forthcoming death,
observing to myself in you.
No, my friend,
I will damn that drop of shy
for you,
that drips on my forehead,
I will damn the year, sharia
allowed,
someone like you to marry

four wives.
What was the spring?
she brought summer on,
When he married autumn,
summer's face paled,
thirsty, and became dry,
the autumn knew,
she will bring a fellow wife
upon her,
she rented all her hair.
When he mated with winter,
and back to spring,
winter's head whitened.
This is your friendship beside
me, oh friend,
so, how don't I damn my
own verses,
which you read them,
you every time construe
them in different ways.
Damned the most damned
differences,
when they divide the days,
Saturday for you,

Sunday for me,
Monday for you,
Tuesday for me,
Wednesday for you,
Thursday for me,
and they gave Friday to you
again,
but, friend,
this time, Saturday will me
mine,
this time, decision is from
me,
I repent myself of you,
of you,
of you.

WHY ARE YOU SI- LENT

Your silence kills me,
your farness crazes me,
I am ready to make the
whole world words,
and make them sleep in one
line of your answer,
then to open their eyes,
with a ding of one of your
letters,
I am ready to snatch all stars
and the moon,
from a night,
to fetch them as a gift for
you,
hence,
no wakefulness of any gleam
would grieve you,
I will make the heaven a
carpet,
lay it beneath your feet,
lest flying would not tire
your wings,
I will do invocation next to a
dervish,



Awezan Nuri is a poet and activist. Awezan set up Pana in 2004 and has worked to raise awareness of the FGM issue and to lobby the government in Baghdad for a nationwide ban. In the political tinderbox of Kirkuk, blighted by frequent sectarian bomb blasts, raising your head above the parapet on an issue such as FGM inevitably puts you in the firing line. Pana also works with women who have suffered domestic abuse.

IT IS REPENTANCE... AND I HAVE DECIDED

If yesterday's bobwhite of my hands,
darts arrows to my today,
I should decide today,
repent from you, oh man,
repent not to adore you
another time,
even for a bit of pleasure,
in the bosom of a night,
a tip of kisses,
in inebriety's glass,
a breath of feelings and
passion,
of lies and pity,
to come and prostrate to
your tribe,
it is repentance and I decide,
to marry the stone.

Not to break me down,
I will go to see Ahreman,
with a wrap of flowers,
to teach me dancing with

fire,
but not to scare me with
burning,
I will be become a dervish of
water,
and beat tabor with clouds,
I will tramp with the rain,
and will pray with myself and
God for awhile,
so as to damp the sins,
and not to let you,
crack them in dryness.
Oh man, you are a part of
abhor,
and, I am of an angel,
till when you close heaven's
door from me,
I want to applaud with my
translucent wings,
fly and fly,
flying in through the core
farness,
and descend.
Your are from me,

3- THE END

A pale spring appeared to us,
declares in impudicity,
the end of winter's season,
it squibs me.
You are no more in need of,
anyone who sends warmth
to you,
collect your disappointment,
with coats,
and throw them,
over,
the last burning firewood.

4- HOPE

My whiteness,
searches for....Your blue-
ness.
Oh sea,
accept me as its seagull,
or,
a dancing sail,
over your waves,
and in the evening,
I will disappear.

5- SPARROWS' SHORES

At the shores,
of her eyes,
a guard,
of sparrows' forest,
has sat down.

Local Writers



Elham Nassar Al-Zobaedi holds a BA Music, Institute of Fine Arts, 1984. Ilham is an active member of organizations promoting the rights of women, children and the elderly in Iraq and has been instrumental in the development of several programs. She currently represents the Society for the Protection and Development of the Iraqi Family in Basra. Ilham has conducted research on and written about violence against women and children and the problems of widows and orphans in Iraq and has contributed to various workshops. In particular, she has been active in the Amar International Charitable Foundation, where she set up the monthly Journal. She has been project coordinator at the Artists Association Institute since 1985 and is currently preparing a set of short stories.

FROM "WALNUTS' WHISPERS" COLLECTION OF POEMS PUBLISHED BY DAR AL-YANABE', DAMASCUS.

I- MY FATHER

Feast day will come tomorrow,
and I will wait your wraith,
I plead your voice,
coming from the memory,
and gave away to my dream...

I run towards your bosom,
put my head on your chest,
and drown in safe's warmth,
and whisper:

Father... father.

You, the traveler,
and arriver from far away,
every year, your wraith is a feast...

From "Sparrows' Shores"
collection of poems, which
will be published by Dar
Kalimat Nagham, Cairo.

2- A CASE

A star,
drew,
its white threads,
and hid behind the clouds.
I collected... my fingers,
on the remnants,
of kiss's scent,
he had left,
on my hand,
and I took cover,
with it,
behind memories.



Rachel Holmes' new book, *Eleanor Marx: A Life* is published by Bloomsbury on 8 May 2014, described by Golden PEN Award winner Gillian Slovo as “a dazzling account of a woman and her family, an age and a movement, that grips from the first page to the last.”

Holmes is also the author of *The Hottentot Venus: The life and death of Saartjie Baartman* (Bloomsbury) and *The Secret Life of Dr James Barry* (Viking & Tempus Books). Last year Rachel co-edited, with Lisa Appignanesi and Susie Orbach, the much-discussed *Fifty Shades of Feminism* (Virago). She was co-commissioning editor of *Sixty Six Books: 21st Century Writers Speak to the King James Bible* (Oberon, 2011) with Josie Rourke and Chris Haydon. Holmes is curator of the new Impossible Conversations talks series at the Donmar Warehouse in London.

In 2010 she received an Arts Council cultural leadership award as one of Britain's Fifty Women to Watch. Rachel Holmes has worked with and for British Council literature festivals and international programmes since 2000.

**One moment for
Halabja:**

To honour the persons who have been reduced to victims in
our memories.

One moment of no silence, no sorrow.
One moment of thinking
not of your tangled up bodies,
the running colour of your eyes,
your poisoned lips,
this time, one moment of applaud for your remembrance.
One moment of smiling.
One moment of thinking
of your dreams, colourful as finch.

One moment of standing
not in front of the pictures which stonified your shattering,
this time one moment of standing

to pay respect
to the people who wanted to live longer,
to those who were scared
and those who weren't,
those whose hearts were full of amendment

and those who were black-hearted,

to you, all of you
from the old to the young only you all
who used to walk the streets, remember yesterday,
and dream of tomorrow.

Years later we met again
the same man with a few
fingers missing,
bad tempered, not able to
paint.
We never spoke,
we remained on our separate
roofs.

The Penelopes of my homeland

(For the 50,000 widows of
Anfal)

Years and years of silent
labour
the Penelopes of my home-
land
wove their own and their
children's shrouds
without a sign of Odysseus
returning.

Years and years of widow-
hood they lived
without realising, without
ever thinking
that their dream was dead
the day it was dreamt,
that their colourful future
was all in the past,
that they had lived their
destinies
and there was nothing else
to live through.
Years and years of avoiding
despair, not giving up,

holding on to hopes raised
by
palm-readers,
holding on to the wishful
dreams of the nights
and to the just God
who does not allow such
nightmares to continue.

Years and years of raising
more Penelopes and Od-
ysseuses
the waiting mothers of my
home-land grew old and
older
without ever knowing that
they were waiting,
without ever knowing that
they should stop waiting.

Years and years of youth
that was there and went
unnoticed

of passionate love that
wasn't made

of no knocking on the
door after midnight
returning from a very long

journey.
The Penelopes of my
home-land died slowly
carrying their dreams into
their graves,
leaving more Penelopes to
take their place.

My mother's kitchen

I will inherit my mother's kitchen.
Her glasses, some tall and lean, others short and fat, her plates, an ugly collection from various sets, cups bought in a rush on different occasions, rusty pots she can't bear throwing away.
"Don't buy anything just yet," she says, "soon all of this will be yours".

My mother is planning another escape, for the first time home is her destination, the rebuilt house which she will furnish.
At 69 she is excited about starting from scratch it is her ninth time.

She never talks about her lost furniture when she kept leaving her homes behind.
She never feels regret for things, only for her vine in the front garden which spread over the trellis on the porch.
She used to sing for the grapes to ripen
sew cotton bags to protect them from the bees.
I know I will never inherit my mother's trees.

My children

I can hear them talking, my children
fluent English and broken Kurdish.

And whenever I disagree with them they will comfort each other by saying:
Don't worry about mum, she's Kurdish.

Will I be the foreigner in my own home?

Every night that summer when we went to bed on the flat roof, I stayed awake watching the opposite roof where he was, a tiny light turning on every time he puffed his cigarette.

Once I was shown his paintings and I went home and wrote his name all over my books.

I kept imagining what he would say,

how I would respond.
I imagined being married to him, looking after him when he fell ill, cooking for him and washing his hair.
I imagined sleeping on the same roof.

A whole year went by and we never talked then suddenly an empty house opposite us, an empty roof, not staring back and sleepless nights for me.

Homeland, what shall I do with you?

By the murky pond
in which the two sisters drift,
look at your policemen!
Look at the ropes in their
hands!
And now tell me
whether these men
are hunting fish or mer-
maids?
Are they saviours or offend-
ers?

Look at the crowd, turning
up to watch!
Look at their eager eyes and
cameras!
Look how much they yearn
for blood,
for blood and images of
blood,
for abuse and images of
abuse,
for self-immolation and its
images,
for rape and its images.

Might this be the dictator's
fault?
Might it be owing to his
blood-filled cells,
his poisoning our souls,
his slaughter of freedom?
Might this be the heritage of
violence?
Which has turned us into a
people
who know no mercy, feel no
guilt,
and are never shocked?

Might it be the revolution's
fault?
Due to glorifying murder
and the rituals of violence?
Might it be due to its brilliant
lies
and endless promises,
to raping the liberation
and the falling from grace of
its revolutionaries?

I don't know, homeland!
The excuses are numerous
and women are numerous.
Force and violence are
brothers
and women are alone.

Homeland! You are still
filled with blood in my
dreams.
Tell me how can I fix you?
Which crime shall I tackle?
Which wound shall I band-
age?
You tell me, from where shall
I start?

What shall I do to make you
change?
I can't turn my back on you
to carry on as you are.
With what will you change?
The pleading mothers,
angry streets,

and endless analysis
did not change you.

What shall I do with you,
homeland?
What shall I do with all this
blood?
Where shall I put you
to prevent you from filling
my days
with wound, heartbreak and
grief?
Where I shall I put you,
brutalised homeland?
You tell me
where shall I put you?



Choman Hardi was born in Kurdistan-Iraq and was displaced from her homeland at the age of one month. She lived her first five years in a small town outside Tehran and went back to her homecity, Suleimanya at the age of 5. Displaced by political violence once again she moved to Kurdistan-Iraq in 1988 and carried on with her education in Persian. She came to England as a refugee in 1993 where she was educated in Queen's College Oxford (BA, Philosophy and psychology), University College London (MA, Philosophy) and University of Kent in Canterbury (PhD, Mental health). In 1996 and 1998 Choman published two collections of poetry in Kurdish. She has been widely anthologised and four of her poems are studied by English GCSE students since 2010. In 2008, and in collaboration with Mimi Khalvati, she translated Kajal Ahmad's poetry from Kurdish for the Poetry Transla-

tion Centre. This was published in a bilingual chapbook by Enitharmon in 2008.

For her post-doctoral research she was awarded a two year Study Abroad Fellowship by the Leverhulme Trust to research about women survivors of genocide in Kurdistan-Iraq during which she was a visiting scholar at the Uppsala Program for Holocaust and Genocide Studies. The resulting book, *Gendered Experiences of Genocide, Anfal survivors in Kurdistan- Iraq*, was published by Ashgate in 2011 and selected by the Yankee Book Peddler as a UK Core Title. Currently she works as an independent writer and researcher and lives in Munich. In 2012 and along with Najiba Mahmud and Bayan Salman she founded the first professional and independent feminist journal in Kurdish, *Serdemi Jin (Women's Era)* of which she is Editor in Chief.

You

When I think of you,
You, who even in those dark times
Showed no emotion,
Shed not a single tear.
You who say now
that the hardships of exile are just too hard to bear.
I tell you this!
There is only one exile
exile from life itself.
Don't be fooled
Life is just an illusion,
We are each a narrative
meandering between camps of self-deception,
prisons of endurance,
tombs for a last breath
So I reclaim my memories.
Reject your refusal to remember.
How can you say nothing then about such devastation
Yet weep now at the damage done to a small rose?
In the garden we share,
The three of us
There is just you
me
and The Cross.

He sang with his heart
 but his mouth did no singing.
 The richest of all his songs
 was silence. His life was
 death's little dance
 and his days all
 emptiness - a whispering
 void.

2. *Gilgamesh*

Gilgamesh.
 He's alone now.
 Snow covers him.
 He's all at sea.
 Swaddled in lushness ,

he looks to the grass of life
 for help
 but
 there's no one there
 to hear him.
 Uruk is an empty ruin, all its
 people fled.
 Such devastation; the streets
 shimmer in a caul of silence.
 He wanders alone -
 not a single tree shades his
 scorched soul, no wine to
 quench his longing.
 All alone, he cries,
 and because victory for him
 is a defeat that never ends
 till the ends of his life, he
 must
 ride the magic palm frond.
 He walks the streets of

Uruk,
 meets strangers
 who look like him,
 their names like his name
 but
 they are strangers.
 Strangers
 in this unrecognisable land.
 Master,
 this swelling music from the
 fringes of the soul
 always growing closer.
 I am burned by the lies
 Hope told me.
 This body, burning,
 these mirrors reflecting
 absolutely nothing. Even the
 darkness burns.
 There is nothing there,
 not a thing.
 Get yourself away from here.
 Don't ever come back.
 Perhaps this is a poem that
 never ends.

3. *Conclusion*

He had seen
 nothing;
 all around him
 the ending of things, nothing
 more:
 no towers
 no stairways,
 there wasn't even a song
 to sing in all that desolation.

He was soaring high; so very
 high
 he was pulled close
 to his uttermost dreams
 and suddenly tumbled back
 down,
 plummeted
 towards
 the poem.



Ghareeb Iskander is an Iraqi poet & writer living in London since 2002. He studied Arabic literature at Baghdad University. This year he will start a PhD programme at SOAS, University of London. He published the following books: Sawad Basiq (High Darkness), collection of poems, 2001, Beirut, (in Arabic); Semiotic Trends in the Critique of Arabic Poetry, 2002 Cairo, 2009 Baghdad (in Arabic); Mahafat Alwahm (A Chariot of Illusion), collection of poems, 2009, Beirut, (in Arabic); and A Chariot of Illusion, selection of poems translated into English, 2009 London, Af'a Gilgamesh (Gilgamesh's Snake), collection of poems, 2012, Beirut, (in Arabic) which is now being translated into English by John Glenday; Al-Khitab (Discourse, by Sara Mills), 2012, Beirut; Translating Sayyab into English (London, 2013). He has taken part in Erbil, Reel and Wigtown festivals.

Flamenco

In Lorca's poetry
the dancer who danced
the dance of the dead man
wore a manton as red
as a Tavern lamp.

She couldn't have known
how that crimson colour
which reminded her
of roses in bloom
reminds me of blood.

Gilgamesh's Snake **A poem in three acts**

I. Song

He sang the sum of things:
the drowsing pavement,
the unfamiliar dawn.
He sang his soul and body.
His lover and his mother.
He sang angels, he sang
devils.

He sang Springtime -
the flowers which open
themselves
after a long night.
He sang the streets
but he wouldn't sing the
hinderer walls.

He sang
and he sang
and sang.

He sang with his eyes
and with his hands.

Miss Jenkins

More and more, lately, when
absence thickened the air
at the schoolgates, in the
street, first thing on waking,
she'd think of her former
calling, the way it had defined
her.

In the dim, sugar-paper blur
of the light,
while boiling the kettle or
kneeling over weeds,
many times at dusk now (the
streetlights coming on)
she'd feel herself alive, trans-
ported
once again to the bright,
tall-windowed classroom,
chalky-fingered, cherished by
her peers, and walking –
that brisk and rhythmic pace

she adopted, all her working
days.

Even in sleep, her breath
would rise and fall with
the sharp pat pat of the chil-
dren's feet approaching and

she'd sense – in her blood –
like a counterpoint beneath
it,
the slap of books upon each
child-size table
whenever she set up class
for their arrival.

Whenever she set up class
for their arrival – the slap of
books upon each child-size
table – she'd sense in her
blood, like a counterpoint
beneath it,

the sharp pat pat of the chil-
dren's feet approaching and
even in sleep her breath would
rise and fall with
that brisk and rhythmic pace
she adopted, all her working
days.

Chalky-fingered, cherished by
her peers, and walking
once again to the bright,
tall-windowed classroom,
she'd feel herself alive; trans-
ported.

Many times at dusk now (the
streetlights coming on),
while boiling the kettle or
kneeling over weeds,
in the dim, sugar-paper blur of
the light,
she'd think of her former call-
ing, the way it had defined her,
at the schoolgates, in the
street, first thing on waking –
more and more, lately, when
absence thickened the air.

Inkling

Last night I sensed a taking
root
under the bonecage of my
heart,
a stirring, shifting; something
not
quite of a breath or heart-
beat's weight.
It was the inkling of a soul.
Now I shall have no peace
at all
till he's caught and fastened,
nested in the cradle of my
pelvic bone.

Then, in the coracle of my
womb, I'll carry him gently,
every inch home though the
hour is late
in the lengthening light

to the crook of my arm, the
bay's curved shore,
water-lapped, twilight, secure.

In English, “ghost-lines” refer to the very faint, but colourless, second lines that sometimes appear on a pregnancy test stick after the required three-minute wait is up. A strong, coloured second line would indicate a pregnancy, but these “ghost lines” are nothing more than evaporation marks. A ghost line for a ghost baby.

Ghost

She stands for a long time,
next to the brightening
window,
the quiet expanse of bed like
a field behind her;
below her the lane, the bed-
like field beyond.

The Kaffir lily's ablaze by the
gate, the pigeons cu-
coo ru cu-coo. But she's
mute as a nun
in her blue flannel gown; she
levels her gaze on the sill —

the thick gloss paint, the
silver nail file,
the shop-bought testing-stick
she's prised apart,
in pieces now beside the
weeping fig ...

She takes it all in, like a small,

controlled explosion:
here is the inch-long stiff,
absorbent pad —
a stopped tongue, the damp
on it still; and the plastic
housing

with its cut-out windows.
And here is the latex strip
(two lines for yes), the single
band of purple
and beside it the silvery
ghost of a second line

willed into being – frail as
the arm of a sea-frond
trailed in the ocean – but
failing to darken or turn
into more than a water
mark.

[To hold in reserve]

she plans to take, or the trip of a lifetime, looks up now from the stirring omens of the astrology column at a girl – thirteen if she’s a day – standing in next to nothing in the driveway opposite, one hand flat against her stomach, one shielding her eyes to gaze up at a pale calf, a silver anklet and the five neat shimmering-oyster-painted toenails of an outstretched foot which catch the sunlight briefly like the flash of armaments before dropping gracefully into the shade of the house.

Jan Grzebski: In 1988 Jan Grzebski, a Polish railway worker, fell in front of a train and was diagnosed as being in a coma. In 2007, he “woke up” to learn the iron curtain had fallen and he had gained 11 grandchildren.

This Silence Between Us

This silence that lies between us like a body that long ago gave up responding to pain, still less to light (which is pain’s opposite), that cannot hear and cannot be awakened, that is, in fact, incontinent and catatonic, but nonetheless demands to be sat beside and talked to, prayed for, cried over, whose limbs and torso must be gently sponged, forehead smoothed, even in the dead of night — especially in the dead of night — this silence, how long do you suppose it can continue?

Miracles happen. Today (and not for the first time)

I remember the story of Jan Grzebski who woke one summer after nineteen years. But it’s his wife I picture, crossing the hallway for nearly two decades — the slap of her feet along the narrow passageway, the slop of water in a plastic bowl till the morning when, half-asleep, she recalls she’s left the shutters open and the window lifted where a thin net curtain shivers in dusty sunlight as slowly the bedstead, the bulk of the body, zigzag into place in the frame of the doorway: sunlight, body, counterpane, all of it’s just as it should be but — dear God! His eyes! Like two bright fish as swim in the propped-up head.

There are those who say

that miracles are born of faith, that trust alone might make you turn and talk again...

I lie down next to my body so close I think I smell its sour breath. Still here, I whisper, but it does not stir. Then gently, with a fingertip, I lift one leathery eyelid where the soul is crouched and speak to it directly. — Not a flicker, but it does not faze me. It is only a matter of time before one of us wakes.



Julia Copus was born in London and now lives in Somerset. All three of her collections are Poetry Book Society Recommendations. She has won First Prize in the National Poetry Competition and the Forward Prize for Best Single Poem (2010). In 2012, she was shortlisted for the Ted Hughes Award for Ghost Lines, a cycle of radio poems following the journey of a couple undergoing IVF treatment. Her third collection, *The World's Two Smallest Humans*, was published in 2012 by Faber and shortlisted for the T.S. Eliot Prize and the Costa Poetry Award. This year sees the publication of her first book for children, *Hog in the Fog* (Faber, 2014). She is co-director of the national Reading Round scheme for the Royal Literary Fund, and in 2008 was made an Honorary Fellow at the University of Exeter.

An Easy Passage

Once she is halfway up
there, crouched in her bikini
on the porch roof of her
family's house, trembling,
she knows that the one thing
she must not do is to think
of the narrow windowsill,
the sharp drop of the stair-
well; she must keep her mind
on the friend with whom she
is half in love
and who is waiting for her
on the blond
gravel somewhere beneath
her, keep her mind on her
and on the fact of the open
window,
the flimsy, hole-punched,
aluminium lever
towards which in a moment
she will reach
with the length of her whole
body, leaning in
to the warm flank of the
house. But first she steadies
herself, still crouching, the

grains of the asphalt
hot beneath her toes and
fingertips,
a square of petrified beach.
Her tiny breasts rest lightly
on her thighs. — What can
she know of the way the
world admits us less and less
the more we grow? For now
both girls seem
lit, as if from within, their
hair and the gold stud ear-
rings in the first one's ears;
for now the house exists
only for them, set back as it
is from the long, grey
eye of the street, and far
away from the mother who
does not trust her daughter
with a key,
the workers about their
business in the drab
electroplating factory over
the road,
far too, most far, from the
flush-faced secretary
who, with her head full of
the evening class

job for my scientist father, we had ended up here, at the bottom of the map: two adults and two teenagers, plus a piano.

These days, my 26-year old life was housed in a small, suburban rented flat with motel curtains and mouldy corners. I spent my days writing a commissioned travel guide on India which I had recently visited with the hope of 'finding' myself. Why do we expect to find ourselves in India? It's already overcrowded. I came close to losing myself, along with much of my body weight, to intestinal parasites and culture shock. I returned to Auckland two months later, sick, disoriented, jobless and broke.

But my chief difficulty in life was that I had a problem with 'reality'. I just couldn't see the point of it – not unless you could do something interesting with it. This is why after graduating from university, I had turned to writing full-time, resulting in a couple of books, no regular income, no chance of normal employment, and a lifestyle more solitary than that of a monk in a hilltop monastery. I was living in a suburban Pacific city where the people were friendly and sun-

burnt, and spoke in pinched vowels, and the beaches were vast and empty like the ocean and the sky that locked them in from all sides. It had nice weather though, and under the unblinking Antipodean sun, you could revel in an orgy of colours – green volcanic hills, blue ocean studded with the thousand white sails of boats. This was, after all, the City of Sails, host of the America's Cup this same year, and home to great champions of the physical world. If you liked sailing, rugby, and reality, and if you had your own house with a garden, you were in paradise.

I didn't, and I wasn't. I was stuck somewhere between the old country and the New World, no longer East European, but not a 'fush and chups' Kiwi either. Maybe this is what James meant about tango being my element. I had no other elements here.

lage idiot. No, it sounds like black velvet. It is perversely difficult to play, and in a maestro's hands, it produces a sound somewhere between high art and low life. It is the king of street retro, and with his 'diabolical' bandoneon, Piazzolla became the godfather of modern tango music. Whether you can, or should dance to Piazzolla was far too early for me to question. I was too busy being swept off my feet.

That night, I danced to a couple more Piazzollas with James, whose frantic style made me think of a cheerful tractor ploughing the expanse of the bar floor. The tempo of the music was increasing to a demented crescendo, and by the time we crashed into a grand finale with the violent 'Libertango', the Chileans behind the bar were looking mildly alarmed.

Then James explained the move he'd done repeatedly, which consisted of me stepping backwards as his hand pressed insistently into the small of my back.

'It's the backward ocho,' he demonstrated. 'Tango's most common figure. It means eight in Spanish because your feet are describing an invisible num-

ber eight on the floor.' That was a pleasant explanation of why I felt like a tripped-up horse. There was also the forward ocho, where you are stepping forwards as your partner steps back, to give you space. Except in James' case, he was dragging me forth. But tango was like that, wasn't it? Forceful, majestic, dangerous!

(Pausa: if the leader makes you feel like a tripped-up horse, it's not your fault. It's his, even if you are the beginner. But in this case, we were both beginners, so do take pity on us.)

I asked James the name of the mellow tune we'd danced to. It was 'Años de soledad', Years of Loneliness. Of course. It could have been the soundtrack for my life.

My years of loneliness had started with my sudden arrival in New Zealand from Bulgaria as a teenager in the early 1990s. Our family was swept up in the great exodus that flowed to the four corners of the world from post-Berlin Wall Eastern Europe. For reasons that were bewildering even to us but involved post-communism, desperation, and a university

Our faces were suddenly very close, which was a bit disturbing, but not as disturbing as the sudden closeness of our bodies. I could feel his body heat. It had been some time since I'd last felt the heat of a man's body.

'Don't worry about what your feet are doing, that's my job,' Geoff continued. 'And don't look down.'

Easier said than done, of course. I continued clinging to him from the waist up, and flopping from the waist down. I had no idea whether we were following the music which featured a soulful accordion and a low-pitched violin. There was no beat to it, it was pure melody in a minor key. It was overflowing with a melancholy of the kind that would, under normal circumstances, lodge itself in your throat and stay there for hours, like an existential nasal drip. But these were not normal circumstances. I was moving with the music, we were moving with the music, the closeness wasn't so disturbing anymore. In fact, it was beginning to feel natural. What we were doing was the only sensible response to music like this. And instead of choking me, the melancholy notes ran through me in delicious rivulets, like rainwater in parched earth.

By the end of the dance, I had a dreamy smile on my face, or possibly a dopy grin. I hadn't fallen over, nobody was laughing at me, and I hadn't even noticed that

'the others' had arrived. True, the others consisted just of my friend James, but he is the kind of guy who arrives and fills up the bar.

'KK!' he exclaimed with a conspiratorial smirk. 'I knew you'd take to tango like a fish to water. Geoff, we've got a new recruit.'

'And she's got promise,' Geoff grinned.

And before James whisked me off for another dance – goodness, I was already popular! – I asked Geoff what we'd just danced to. Piazzolla, came the answer. I assumed that was the name of the piece – it sounded right somehow, elegant and dangerous and instrumental – just as I assumed the button instrument to be an accordion.

I made a lot of assumptions in the next year or so – always a bad idea, but especially with couple dancing where everything is so unpredictable. I found out that Piazzolla wasn't a title, it was a man. A man who had wrenched tango from the dusty belle époque corner where it was languishing, and manoeuvred it into the centre-stage of late 20th century music. Astor Piazzolla wrote violent, gorgeous orchestral scores. The second thing I found out was that the quintessential tango instrument is the bandoneon. It doesn't sound anything like the accordion which by comparison is the happy vil-

2. Barbarous Tango

‘Yes, you. I don’t see anyone else here.’

It wasn’t a nod, it was a proffered hand.

‘But I can’t dance,’ I said and shrunk on my bar stool.

‘Everyone can dance,’ the man said. He had a bulbous nose and a smile like a sunset. His name was Geoff and he was an IT consultant. His partner had a handsome face shiny with sweat and make-up, and she was married to someone else, though she didn’t tell me that straight away. She was wearing black, down to her stockings and high-heeled shoes, and she was now having a drink next to me at the bar.

‘He’s a very good leader,’ she said. ‘Even a beginner can follow a good leader.’

‘But I can’t dance,’ I said again.

‘Let’s just give it a try,’ Geoff wasn’t giving up. ‘We need more ladies.’

We? Perhaps there was some sort of underground Tango Vista Social Club in Auckland – a city that died a death as soon as business hours were over.

‘How did you hear about this place?’ he wanted to know.

‘Well,’ I said, ‘My friend James told me to meet hi

here tonight, but didn’t say why. And now he’s not here.’ James was my only friend in Auckland where I’d been living for the past year. ‘Let’s have a go, before the others arrive,’ Geoff extended a gentlemanly hand again, to help me off my stool. ‘You might even enjoy it.’

What the hell – I hadn’t enjoyed anything for some time now, so what was the worst that could happen? I could trip over and fall on my face, and then the Chileans and Geoff’s partner would laugh at me. It wouldn’t be the end of the world.

So before I knew what had hit me, I was dancing my first tango. Okay, dancing isn’t the word. I was hanging onto Geoff’s neck, and my body was doing a good imitation of a rag doll suddenly come to life.

I remembered that *scene in Scent of a Woman* where the girl ‘spontaneously’ dances with a blind Al Pacino. ‘There are no mistakes in tango’, he says in that husky voice of his, and I wanted to believe him. I also wanted to spontaneously look as good as she did. After all, I didn’t even have to do the silly head dips.

(Pausa: you don’t do head dips in Argentine tango, only in ballroom tango. And by the way, it’s impossible to look good dancing the tango when you’ve never done it before.)

‘Just relax and follow me,’ Geoff said in my ear.

would dance tango for a thousand and one nights straight – then collapse and start all over. My love life, my social life, my whereabouts, my sleep patterns and my posture would be dramatically affected – and not always for the better.

I would criss-cross the globe in search of the authentic tango experience. I would live, in the first person singular, the timeless story of tango: a story of exile and longing, dancehall heaven and its ugly Siamese twin – dancehall hell.

Yes, I would take tango to its fullest cliché, and far beyond. Tango would give me everything I wanted and didn't have that night of the new millennium – friendship, love, beauty, meaning, adventure, ecstasy, home – then it would take it all away and break my heart. Then it would heal me again, and give me even more, but not in the ways I expected. I would try to quit, and fail – because the spaces tango opens up inside you never close up. Tango is like heroin – it changes you metabolically.

I said first person singular, but that's only half the truth. The other half is of course tango's most famous cliché: it takes two. The question is which combination of two, exactly. And how many thousands of 'twos' are possible before you find the one for you, the one with

whom you can have what this couple in the empty bar were having. Or was I just watching a fantasy?

Please, don't let it be a fantasy, I prayed on my bar stool that night. And if it is, please let me live this fantasy too.

Even as I was sitting on my stool, and even as you read this, hundreds of couples are tangoing somewhere in the world, somewhere out of sight. They tango in the Southern hemisphere until dawn, and they tango at dusk in the Northern hemisphere. There is a point somewhere between the sun and the moon where for a short while, everyone is dancing at the same time.

Like the subconscious, tango may be out of sight, but it never sleeps.

And if it's out of sight, that's only because you don't know where to look. You haven't been initiated into the ways of the global tango village. You haven't had your twelve minutes. Yet.

Tango is the Masonic club of the dance world. If you make it, at some point the coveted secret handshake will come your way. It's called the cabeceo, a barely perceptible nod of the head from across the dance hall, inviting you to a dance, and signalling that you are in business.

Who, me?

from Twelve Minutes of Love
a tango story

by Kapka Kassabova

This story is dedicated to all my fellow dancers in the global tango village who are dancing, each in their own way, for a better world

I. Just a Tango

One muggy Antipodean evening at the dawn of this millennium, I walked down an empty street and into an empty tapas bar called Fuego, or Fire. It had black walls, a gilded rococo mirror, and a single couple on the dimly lit floor.

To the sound of drastic accordion music in a minor key, they clung to each other, their arms and legs twitching, as if drowning. Except they weren't, because their faces were haloed with the kind of sublime light Jehovah's witnesses acquire shortly after being in touch with god.

I perched on a velvet stool to watch. I don't know if it was premonition or *déjà-vu*, but the whole scene felt familiar and personal.

The sides of their faces were glued together with sweat. The woman's eyes were closed. They danced as if for the last time. And they were not doing it for me or for some imaginary audience. They were doing it for themselves. They were dancing an entire lifetime into a few minutes.

Then I suddenly saw that I wasn't the only on-looker. An aged couple were watching from behind the bar, but they were so small that I hadn't spotted them before. They had that slightly dishevelled, how-did-I-wash-up-here look of the Antipodean émigré.

'What is this?' I asked them.

'Tango,' the man said.

'Argentinean tango,' the woman specified. She was wiping glasses with a cloth.

'Well,' the man said, 'Some people say that tango come from Uruguay.'

'But we are from Chile,' the woman explained.

'We dance too, you know,' the man said.

'When there isn't nobody watching,' the woman smiled coyly.

That sealed it – I was a convert.

The kindly Chileans went bankrupt shortly after, but that night altered the course of my life. For the next decade, I would breathe tango, dream tango, love-and-hate tango. I

British Council Writers:



Kapka Kassabova is a poet, novelist and travel writer. Her family emigrated from Bulgaria to New Zealand just after the fall of the Berlin Wall. *Street Without a Name* (2008) is her coming-of-age story of communist Bulgaria; it was short-listed for the Prix du livre européen and the Dolmann Travel Club Award. *Twelve Minutes of Love* (2011), short-listed for the Scottish Book Awards, is a story of Argentine tango, obsession, and the search for home. Her novel *Villa Pacifica* (2011) is set in South America and her poetry collections are *Someone else's life* and *Geography for the Lost*. She is also a translator from Bulgarian and a regular contributor for *The Guardian*, *Intelligent Life*, and the *Scottish Review of Books*. After spending her late teens and twenties in New Zealand, Kapka moved to Scotland and now lives in the Scottish Highlands.

from *The Immigrant Cycle*

Security

After the long day
 My father locks the doors
 The windows
 The blinds on the windows
 He locks out the voice of the
 wind
 The question of yesterday
 My mother turns off every
 light
 In every room, in every
 cupboard
 She turns off the TV
 The red light of the heart
 flashing
 The last star
 In this forever foreign sky
 And carefully they lie in bed
 Listening to the sound
 Of growing children

Twenty years later

My father's breath is like a
 cave
 of dripping stalactites and
 echo.
 My mother sleeps and in her
 dreams
 the worst is happening, again.
 Mountains surround us and
 muffle
 the edge of younger times,
 the names
 of places where we've said
 goodbye
 and once again, we'll say
 goodbye.
 And carefully I lie in bed,
 listening
 to the sound of distant snow.

Written on the Body

2:00pm – 4:00pm: Panel Discussion

Our daily lives are saturated with culturally imposed narratives about how the female body should look. What impact does this have on women, from youth to old age? A panel of local and international writers come together to discuss this theme, including Julia Copus, whose recent poems explore the sometimes ghostly relationship between women and fertility, and Kapka Kassabova, whose recent memoir recounts the bodily pleasures and perils of tango. Also featuring Ruaa Zuhir, Mariem Maythem Qasem Al-Attar and Zhwen Shalai. Chaired by Choman Hardi.

Venue: Goran Hall at Chwar Chra Hotel

Simultaneous translation will be provided

Finale: New Beginnings

5:30pm – 7:00pm:

Music And Readings To Close The Festival

Three writers from the festival – Choman Hardi, Abdul Mutalib and Elham Nasser Al Zobaedi – will deliver keynote speeches on what they have discovered over the course of the previous three days and will look ahead to the challenges facing women. With music from Iraqi National Orchestra Organization for Youth and readings from students and writers selected from the Ninititi Writing Workshops.

A selection of classical and traditional Kurdish and Iraqi music played by the Iraqi National Orchestra Organization for Youth. With Annie Skender Awanes playing first violin, Alan Abdulrazaq Rasheed playing second violin, Tuqa Sa'ad ja'afer playing the cello and Daroon Abdulrazaq Rasheed playing the viola.

Venue: Goran Hall at Chwar Chra for readings followed by Hotel Garden for music

Simultaneous and textual translation will be provided

Day 3

24 April

Found in Translation

11:00am – 12:30pm: Poetry Reading

This very special event features poetry from four poets based in the UK and four Iraqi poets. Presenting new translations in Arabic, English and Kurdish will be Mariem Maythem Qasem Al-Attar, Ahmad Abdel Hussein, Zhwen Shalai, Nia Davies, Vicki Feaver, SJ Fowler and Kei Miller. This event is the culmination of the Reel Arts translation project which will take place prior to the festival where these eight poets will work together in the tranquility of the Safeen mountains. This reading will reveal not only the original poetic intention of the authors but also the unique intimacy and empathy possible between poets with different cultures and traditions but surprisingly similar concerns.

Venue: [Chwar Chra Hotel](#)

Simultaneous translation will be provided

Simultaneous translation will be provided.

Present Day Penelopes: the Mad, Bad Girls of Myth and Legend

4:30pm – 5:30pm: Poetry Readings

What can epic heroines, heroes and the poets who brought them into being tell us about the present? From Gilgamesh, the demigod King of Uruk and great hero of Sumerian poetry, who was devoted to his mother Ninsun and rebuilt the sanctuary of the goddess Ninlil, to Odysseus who left Penelope waiting for him whilst he set out on his adventures, to Enheduanna, the first major Sumerian poet who was expelled from Ur where she was also a princess, what modern parallels can be drawn? Readings from Ghareeb Iskander whose most recent poetry revisits the myth of Gilgamesh, Choman Hardi, Vicki Feaver, Samarqand Al-Jabiri and Salem Balayi, followed by a panel discussion chaired by Dr Himdad Abdul-Qahhar Muhammad.

As Choman Hardi's poem 'The Penelopes of my Homeland' begins:

**Years and years of silent labour
the Penelopes of my homeland
wove their own and their children's shrouds
without a sign of Odysseus returning.**

6:00pm – 7pm: Panel Discussion

Venue: Goran Hall Chwar Chra Hotel

Simultaneous translation will be provided

Day 2

23 April

Storytelling Workshop

10:30am – 12:30pm

Stories surround us and shape the way we understand ourselves. In these multilingual workshops for aspiring storytellers, writers participating in the festival will explore a variety of techniques, including oral history. The English language workshop will be hosted by Rachel Holmes, in Arabic by Ghareeb Iskander and in Kurdish by Choman Hardi. The best piece of writing from each workshop will be selected by the workshop leader to be read at the public closing event.

[Venue: Cultural Centre at Salahaddin University](#)

Speaking Truth to Power

2:00pm – 3:30pm: A Roundtable Discussion

In this discussion leading authors and cultural figures explore the relationship between feminism, art and politics today. What are the strengths of literature in shining a light on political issues? Ranging from the local to the international and from sectarianism to FGM, this roundtable will feature Choman Hardi, Rachel Holmes, Mam Botani, Ahmad Abdel Hussein and Nidhal Al Qadhi. Chaired by Dr Fadhil President of the Iraqi Writer's Union.

[Venue: Goran Hall at Chwar Chra Hotel](#)

Poetry Writing Workshops

2:00pm – 4:00pm

Three parallel poetry workshops for twenty students each will be run in each of the main languages, hosted by writers participating in the festival. The English language workshop will be taught by Kapka Kassabova; the Kurdish language workshop by Rozh Halabjay and the Arabic language workshop by Shaker Siffo. The best piece of writing from each workshop will be selected by the workshop leader to be read at the public closing event.

Venue: Cultural Centre at Salahaddin University

Echoes of Enheduanna: Opening Event

Enheduanna was an Akkadian princess of the city-state of Ur and the author of The Sumerian Temple Hymns which have survived from the Old Babylonian peri-

od and continue to be read and sung to this day. This opening event of music and readings celebrates Enheduanna's enduring influence by showcasing a range of contemporary international and local writers.

5:30pm-5:50pm: Musical Performance

A selection of classical and traditional Kurdish and Iraqi music played by the Iraqi National Orchestra Organization for Youth. With Annie Skender Awanes playing first violin, Alan Abdulrazaq Rasheed playing second violin, Shahad Jamal Abdulazzez playing the cello and Daroon Abdulrazaq Rasheed playing the viola.

6:00pm-7:30pm: Poetry Reading

Readings from all the international and local poets including Julia Copus, Ghareeb Iskander, Choman Hardi and Kapka Kassabova.

Venue: Goran Hall at Chwar Chra Hotel

Simultaneous and textual translation will be provided

Day 1

22 April

Press Conference

9:45am

Coffee and refreshments

10:00am:

Introduction from Key Dignitaries and Local Partners

10:30am-11:25am:

Ladies of Life: Introductory Poetry Reading and Discussion

Drawing on the title of the festival, NINITI – which is an ancient Sumerian epithet for a goddess meaning ‘Lady of Life’ – we commence with poetry readings from four participating female poets: Choman Hardi, Elham Nassar Al-Zobaedi, Samarqand Al-Jabiri and Awezan Nuri. These readings will be followed by twenty-five minute discussion responding to the poems that have been read and reflecting on the women writers from previous generations who have inspired the panelists, chaired by Rachel Holmes.

Venue: Goran Hall at Chwar Chra Hotel

Simultaneous translation will be provided

Festival Preview

4:00pm – 6:00pm: Poetry and Prose Readings

Introduced by Adalet Garmiany, readings will be given by Abdul Mutabil, Rachel Holmes, Awezan Nuri, Ryan Van Winkle and Ruzh Halabjay to celebrate International Women's Day and the upcoming literature festival in April. The readings will last for fifty minutes and will be followed by a fifteen minute break, after which there will be questions from the floor.

Venue: Erbil Writer's Union

Simultaneous translation will be provided

REEL IRAQ POETRY WORKSHOPS

18 – 21 April

Building on successes of previous years, Reel Arts will bring four UK based poets and four Iraqi poets to Erbil, Iraq in order to participate in four days of translation workshops and collaborative poetry experiments. This will yield dozens of new translations in Arabic, Kurdish, Scots, and English. Production of new work will also be facilitated. It will bring both emerging and established poets together in a relaxed environment where work and friendship between artists can grow. Workshops will be run by Ryan Van Winkle, with the support of Lauren Pyott, Dina Mousawi and Hoshang Waziri.

Venue: Stars Hotel, Shaqlawa

**FESTIVAL PRE-LAUNCH:
INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY
8 MARCH**

Training for Workshop Leaders

11:00am – 12:30am: Workshop

Writer Rachel Holmes and poet Ryan Van Winkle will jointly lead a workshop for the all local writers participating in the festival (22-24 April) on approaches to teaching creative writing. This workshop for workshop leaders will explore a variety of teaching methods for both poetry and prose. During the festival itself the participating writers will teach workshops for aspiring writers and students from a variety of universities in these two literary forms and across the three principle languages: Kurdish, Arabic and English. Applications for April workshops will be simultaneously opened online.

Venue: Salahaddin University

Simultaneous translation will be provided

TEDx Talk in partnership with the United Nations and Springboard

1:30pm – 1:45pm

Rachel Holmes tells the story of 5000 years of feminism from the Sumerians – one of the first societies to produce its own literature (dating from 2600 BC) and shortly after that female poets – all the way to Niniti Festival, and illuminates how this ancient world continues to inspire the best contemporary writers from the region and beyond.

Venue: Rotana Hotel

Simultaneous translation will be provided

Rachel Holmes, Ninita Introduction

Some four and a half thousand years ago the first recorded woman poet was born here in ancient Iraq, then called Mesopotamia. Enheduanna – an Akkadian high priestess born in the citystate of UR. A poet and scribe, she was the author of The Sumerian Temple Hymns, a collection of ballads written for forty-two temples throughout ancient Mesopotamia. Where so much else here has been ransacked and destroyed by invasion and war, Enheduanna's poetry survives from the Old Babylonian period.

Enheduanna's travelling companions through women's writing include legendary figures whose origins are also local. These are demoness prophets. The bad, mad girls of antiquity who challenged the authority of patriarchy, who left their husbands; or who didn't have husbands at all. These are the ancient founder voices of global culture. This year the United Nations chooses for its call: Equality for Women is Progress for All. Listen carefully to the voices of history. Dust off the writing not scratched out or drowned or violated or murdered by the storm and rubble of patriarchal cultural inventions and sexual violence, and you will hear and read the lin-

eage of women poets and scribes, writers and fighters, pioneers, outliers and rebel leaders who kept the fire of freedom stoked and burning for millennia. The daughters of the nineteenth century world inherited their tradition.

A system that is fundamentally based on the principle of unequal power relationships cannot be 'balanced' and cannot be made equal. We want to be equal to freedom and liberated from patriarchy. And To do this, we must get rid of it. This is why the fight for equal rights, though important, will never be enough on its own. If we only demand rights for women to be equal to men within the existing societies in which we live, we will continue to be born unfree. Feminism is the organised, political force of liberation in action and it is the necessary physical movement that is required to set ourselves free. The personal risks and sacrifices are high, danger is everywhere, but the alternative is to remain in the global prison house of patriarchy, in which we can never be equal – not equal to men, but equal to ourselves. NINITI, the goddess of life and the champion of this international literature festival that brings together women and men and organisations of from many cultures and nations together in one cause, holds her pen in a firm grip and challenges us, through art and poetry and song – to go ahead together, and make the world anew.

ArtRole

ArtRole, is an International contemporary arts organisation dedicated to building a cultural bridge between the Middle East and rest of the world facilitating artistic dialogue and mutual support including international artist exchanges, artist residencies, exhibitions, performances, presentations, arts festivals and workshops, human rights and environmental conferences.

It works to establish harmonious connections through the medium of art and art education.

ArtRole works within the commitment to promote human rights, freedom of speech and communication between genders and diverse communities. It offers innovative ways for cultural diplomacy by using the Arts and Culture as platforms for dialogue and personal expression within and among different communities in Iraq and beyond.

All activities support the building of a modern, democratic, creative and multicultural Iraq by developing international and inter-generational.

ArtRole was founded in 2004 by British artist of Kurdish-Iraqi origin, Adalet R. Garmiany.



The **British Council** creates international opportunities for the people of the UK and other countries and builds trust between them world wide. We call this work cultural relations.

We work in six continents and over 100 countries, bringing international opportunity to life, every day. Each year we work with millions of people, connecting them with the United Kingdom, sharing our cultures and the UK's most attractive assets: English, the Arts, Education and our ways of living and organising society. We have 80 years' experience of doing this.